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Three Republican members of Congress yesterday announced the introduction of separate pieces of legislation that would revoke the government pension of a member of Congress who is convicted of a white-collar crime.

"I really believe that the American people expect their federal employees, especially members of Congress, to be held to a higher ethical standard," Rep. Lee Terry (R-Neb.), the sponsor of one of the bills, said during a press conference yesterday.

Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), author of similar legislation, said he, Terry and nearly two dozen lawmakers who have signed on to the two bills are "building a critical mass for reform."

Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.) also introduced similar legislation.

Terry's Public Trust and Accountability Act, which has 15 co-sponsors, adds a list of crimes such as bribery, embezzlement and perjury to the existing statute in Title 5 of U.S. Code. The law stipulates that any federal employee, regardless of rank, loses retirement benefits if he or she is convicted of violating national security or treason.

Kirk's bill, the Congressional Integrity Act of 2005, limits the punishment to members of Congress who commit crimes of bribery, illegal compensation, fraud, solicitation and tax evasion. Twelve lawmakers have signed on to the legislation.

Neither bill addresses the issue of convicted lawmakers' keeping or losing the privileges normally afforded former members, such as the use of the gym facilities, floor privileges and parking.

The lawmakers are optimistic about securing broad support. During the press conference, Kirk noted that in 1996 similar legislation passed the House 391-32, with Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Texas) and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) all voting for the bill. It was eventually killed in the Senate.

Terry and Kirk indicated that Hastert's staff had spoken of possible reform. The lawmakers have each signed on to the other's bill to show solidarity.

While the renewed push to deter lawmakers from breaking the law was sparked by the indictment and resignation of Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-Calif.), Terry and Kirk said they had worked on reform legislation before the Cunningham scandal.

The bill could not be applied retroactively.

Cunningham, a member of the House Appropriations Committee's Defense and Intelligence subcommittees, announced his resignation from Congress on Nov. 28 after pleading guilty in a California district court to charges of tax evasion and conspiracy. He will be sentenced Feb. 27 and could receive up to five years in prison on each of the two counts. In entering a guilty plea, he admitted taking \$2.4 million in bribes.

Rep. Melissa Hart (R-Pa.) said, "Members of Congress did not condone [Cunningham's actions]. In fact, members of Congress are pretty angry about it."

Hart has also signed on to the Terry bill.

Terry bill co-sponsor Rep. John Sullivan (R-Okla.) said constituents at a recent meeting with him expressed shock that such legislation was not already in place.

"I believe this long-needed legislation will become law," he said. "I'm very proud of [the bill] and ashamed [the issue] hasn't already been voted on."

Rep. Ginny Brown-Waite (R-Fla.) a co-sponsor of Terry's bill, also co-sponsored a 2003 bill introduced by Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Fla.), after Rep. James Traficant's (D-Ohio) 2002 expulsion from Congress, that would have prevented any lawmakers from receiving congressional pensions if they are expelled. It stalled after being sent to the House Administration and Government Reform committees for action. Terry was also a co-sponsor on that legislation.

Traficant was convicted on 10 counts of racketeering, fraud and bribery and is serving eight years in prison.

Terry said that the staff of the Government Reform Committee had been notified the bill could be coming to them and that Chairman Tom Davis (R-Va.) had also been made aware. He added that neither the House Administration Committee nor its chairman, Rep. Bob Ney (R-Ohio), had yet been contacted.

The Administration Committee said it had no comment on the new bills because it had not yet seen them.

The Speaker's office is currently reviewing the legislation according to a spokesman.

A spokesman for the Government Reform Committee could not be reached for comment by press time.